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TAGS: [AEMR](#) [AMGT](#) [KFLO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PK](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: CONVERSATIONS WITH BENAZIR BHUTTO

REF: ISLAMABAD 04793

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: Ambassador spoke to Benazir Bhutto November 8 and 9 to express concerns for Bhutto's safety and to urge her to consider the possible effect her rally and arrest might have on polarization and violence in the country. They spoke again mid-day as Bhutto was trying to leave her house but was physically blocked. The GOP, through repeated telephone appeals from NSA Advisor Tariq Aziz, wanted the USG and (to a lesser extent the UK) to persuade her to cancel her rally and to remain at home. (See reftel.) Bhutto replied that she could not abandon the party activists who had already been arrested. Bhutto has managed to back the government into another embarrassing crackdown--and the government stupidly fell into the trap--while not exposing herself or her supporters to a dangerous public meeting. End summary.

12. (C) Ambassador called Bhutto at 10:00 p.m., November 8, to express deep concern for Bhutto's personal safety if she proceeded with the rally. Bhutto said that she appreciated USG concerns but she believed she had no choice but to go ahead. She said she was concerned about the vagueness of Musharraf's promise to take off his uniform and wanted elections to take place in January. Bhutto predicted there would be threats to her en route to the Rawalpindi rally and at the site. She mentioned two of them, an attack en route at an intersection and threats against the actual site in Rawalpindi. Ambassador again urged her to take care of her physical security.

13. (C) Ambassador called Bhutto again November 9 at 9:30 a.m. to urge her to take into account the possible political polarization and violence that might ensue if she pursued her plans for a rally. Ambassador said the situation seemed to be settling down and encouraged her to move in the direction of moderation. Bhutto repeated her concern for the election timetable and Musharraf's retirement as Army chief. She stressed the Pakistani government had arrested senior members of the Pakistan People's Party the previous night. The government even arrested one PPP member and all his family and guests. Bhutto stressed that if she did not support her PPP members, her leadership of the party could be called into question. She said she would keep the Embassy informed after senior members of her party attempted to enter her house for a meeting on November 9.

14. (C) On the afternoon of November 9, Bhutto called the Ambassador to say she was attempting to leave her house.

Bhutto stated government authorities were preventing her from departing but had not yet served her with an arrest arrant. Police were surrounding her house. (Note: In a November 8 telephone conversation, National Security Advisor Tariq Aziz urged Ambassador Patterson to intervene with Benazir Bhutto and informed the Ambassador that, while an arrest warrant had already been issued, Bhutto would not be arrested until she attempts to leave her house. See reftel. End Note.)
PATTERSON